



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*** STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION ADDRESS ***

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

WASB • WASDA • WASBO
State Education Convention Address

Midwest Airline Center, Milwaukee
January 23, 2008

Thank you, Jon Bales, De Forest superintendent and WASDA president, for that kind introduction. We appreciate your leadership in De Forest and as WASDA president.

And thank you to the Bowler High School Band, directed by Alan Marquardt. As a former choir director, music educator, and the daughter of a music educator, I know firsthand how the arts feed the soul and the imagination. We thank our student musicians and Mr. Marquardt for their wonderful performance this morning. Let's give them another round of applause.

I am so honored to serve as your state superintendent and come today to thank you for the tremendous commitment you demonstrate as elected school board members, school district administrators, and school business officials in serving the children, public schools, and communities of Wisconsin. You have some of the toughest jobs in the state, and yet you consistently bring local communities together around our shared responsibility to provide a quality education for all our children.

I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of your associations' and their executive directors:

- John Ashley and all of WASB,
- Miles Turner, WASDA, and
- Woody Wiedenhoef and WASBO.

They do a great job representing and bringing you together. Let's give them a hand.

While I meet with many of you during the course of the year, this annual joint convention is a truly unique opportunity and one of the most important conventions of the year. It is good to be together again this year.

In Wisconsin, we take justifiable pride in our great public schools. More of our students are taking rigorous coursework with nation leading graduation rates and achievement on the ACT. And we are seeing dramatic increases in results on Advanced Placement exams. Our students increased achievement at nearly every grade level in mathematics and had rising or stable scores for reading on our statewide testing this past year.

Thanks to your leadership, our public schools are a continuing source of pride for the people of Wisconsin.

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Your vision and work at the community level ignites public support for our schools. Local control is the heart and soul of Wisconsin's progressive tradition. Leadership at the local level has never been more important. And, the leadership your organizations provide at the state level is a strong voice for our children and is critical to our democratic process. Thank you all for the important work you do.

Raising achievement for all students and closing achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers must be our No. 1 priority. Because, in Wisconsin, we have long held the belief that the days of our children will be better than our own.

We must ensure that every child, no matter the economic or educational level of their parents, race, ethnicity, what language they speak at home, or where they live in our state, is prepared with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the 21st century interconnected world.

You understand this is more than an education issue. It is a moral and social justice issue. And, it is an economic imperative for our state and nation.

We know that a child is more than a test score and that closing the achievement gaps in our state takes the entire community. And, we also know a federal education law is only as effective as its credibility at the local level.

And that is why we must support the National School Boards Association, American Association of School Administrators and the Council of Chief State School Officers as they fight to ensure the reauthorization of NCLB empowers communities to support quality education for all of their children.

A quality education is one that addresses the social, cognitive, emotional, and physical needs of diverse learners beginning in early childhood. To truly "leave no child behind," and not just no child left untested, parents, educators, and communities must be supported through federal law not just handed an under-funded mandate.

This generation will define what it means to be an American in the world today. One hundred years ago, we prepared students to compete with their neighboring communities, 50 years ago with other states. Now, our children must be ready to match knowledge and skills with students around the world. Our children must meet world-class standards, and they need to know the world like they know their neighborhood.

While we have made tremendous gains and our students are showing considerable progress, we know that our real challenge is to go beyond the basics; go beyond the mandates of NCLB; and go beyond where we have traditionally set the bar to a place that empowers all students with the creativity and skills necessary to function and thrive in the 21st century. We must provide students with the skills that are demanded in postsecondary learning environments or in the job markets of the global knowledge economy.

You know this and many of you have strived to create local partnerships with businesses to teach 21st century skills to students. You have increased the rigor and relevance of curriculum through new courses and technologically cutting edge programs. And many of you have increased graduation requirements especially in mathematics and science.

At the state level, we can build on our Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) efforts with my new grant program passed in this year's budget. But there is more work needed in STEM. In the next year, I will advance proposals that will work to:

- Increase the number of Science, Technology, and Mathematics teachers;
- Add course offerings in these areas and expand world language instruction;
- Align our mathematics standards with workplace and post-secondary education skills and expectations;
- And, provide scholarships for our brightest graduates to pursue further studies in STEM in Wisconsin.

As education leaders, we know our public education system can and must continuously meet new challenges. That belief is central to our spirit and success. In Wisconsin, public education is the foundation of our democracy and economic security. We must lead an on-going sustained effort to close the achievement gap, expand STEM instruction, and increase the high school, technical college, and baccalaureate graduation rate.

We also know that a struggling national economy, increased poverty, escalating costs, and revenue caps are all impacting educational opportunities across Wisconsin. As a state we need to do something about this.

You are working harder than ever, and you need all our help.

While it was a long, hard fight, too long, this biennial budget does make crucial investments in what we know works to raise student achievement throughout our state:

- the SAGE program,
- school breakfast,
- early childhood and 4K,
- school nursing services, and
- special education aid.

The budget acts on my new initiatives:

- to recruit our best educators to high poverty schools,
- provide revenue limit flexibility for low revenue school districts and those with declining student enrollment, and
- increases in transportation aid reimbursement.

And, for the first time we secured funding for our sparsity aid program for rural districts, and aid for high poverty districts. This budget also reflects the recognition that healthcare for all children must be available if we are to even begin to close educational achievement gaps.

Throughout the past budget debate, we joined forces in a strong, united voice. We must keep our voices strong in the next debate. As we continue to bring people together around our shared value and responsibility of moving Wisconsin forward through a strong public education system.

It is an honor to work for you and with you as together we fight for the children and quality education in Wisconsin.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTE: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>.